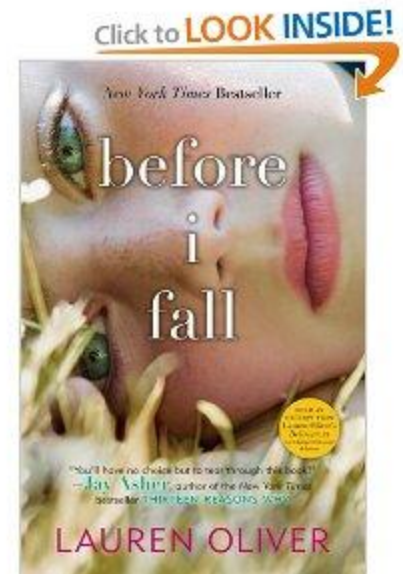


# *Before I Fall* by Lauren Oliver

Read Aloud- Prologue



## PROLOGUE

---

*They say that just before you die your whole life flashes before your eyes, but that's not how it happened for me.*

*To be honest, I'd always thought the whole final-moment, mental life-scan thing sounded pretty awful. Some things are better left buried and forgotten, as my mom would say. I'd be happy to forget all of fifth grade, for example (the glasses-and-pink-braces period), and does anybody want to relive the first day of middle school? Add in all of the boring family vacations, pointless algebra classes, period cramps, and bad kisses I barely lived through the first time around . . .*

*The truth is, though, I wouldn't have minded reliving my greatest hits: when Rob Cokran and I first hooked up in the middle of the dance floor at homecoming, so everyone saw and knew we were together; when Lindsay, Elody, Ally, and I got drunk and tried to make snow angels in May, leaving person-sized imprints in Ally's lawn; my sweet-sixteen party, when we set out a hundred tea lights and danced on the table in the backyard; the time Lindsay and I pranked Clara Seuse on Halloween, got chased by the cops, and laughed so hard we*

*almost threw up—the things I wanted to remember; the things I wanted to be remembered for.*

*But before I died I didn't think of Rob, or any other guy. I didn't think of all the outrageous things I'd done with my friends. I didn't even think of my family, or the way the morning light turns the walls in my bedroom the color of cream, or the way the azaleas outside my window smell in July, a mixture of honey and cinnamon.*

*Instead, I thought of Vicky Hallinan.*

*Specifically, I thought of the time in fourth grade when Lindsay announced in front of the whole gym class that she wouldn't have Vicky on her dodgeball team. "She's too fat," Lindsay blurted out. "You could hit her with your eyes closed." I wasn't friends with Lindsay yet, but even then she had this way of saying things that made them hilarious, and I laughed along with everyone else while Vicky's face turned as purple as the underside of a storm cloud.*

*That's what I remembered in that before-death instant, when I was supposed to be having some big revelation about my past: the smell of varnish and the squeak of our sneakers on the polished floor; the tightness of my polyester shorts; the laughter echoing around the big, empty space like there were way more than twenty-five people in the gym.*

*And Vicky's face.*

*The weird thing is that I hadn't thought about that in forever. It was one of those memories I didn't even know I remembered,*

*if you know what I mean. It's not like Vicky was traumatized or anything. That's just the kind of thing that kids do to each*

*other. It's no big deal. There's always going to be a person laughing and somebody getting laughed at. It happens every day, in every school, in every town in America—probably in the world, for all I know. The whole point of growing up is learning to stay on the laughing side.*

*Vicky wasn't very fat to begin with—she just had some baby weight on her face and stomach—and before high school she'd lost that and grown three inches. She even became friends with Lindsay. They played field hockey together and said hi in the halls. One time, our freshman year, Vicky brought it up at a party—we were all pretty tipsy—and we laughed and laughed, Vicky most of all, until her face turned almost as purple as it had all those years ago in the gym.*

*That was weird thing number one.*

*Even weirder than that was the fact that we'd all just been talking about it—how it would be just before you died, I mean. I don't remember exactly how it came up, except that Elody was complaining that I always got shotgun and refusing to wear her seat belt. She kept leaning forward into the*

*front seat to scroll through Lindsay's iPod, even though I was supposed to have deejay privileges. I was trying to explain my "greatest hits" theory of death, and we were all picking out what those would be. Lindsay picked finding out that she got into Duke, obviously, and Ally—who was bitching about*

*the cold, as usual, and threatening to drop dead right there of pneumonia—participated long enough to say she wished she could relive her first hookup with Matt Wilde forever, which surprised no one. Lindsay and Elody were smoking, and freezing rain was coming in through the cracked-open windows. The road was narrow and winding, and on either side of us the dark, stripped branches of trees lashed back and forth, like*

*the wind had set them dancing.*

*Elody put on “Splinter” by Fallacy to piss Ally off, maybe because she was sick of her whining. It was Ally’s song with Matt, who had dumped her in September. Ally called her a bitch and unbuckled her seat belt, leaning forward and trying to grab the iPod. Lindsay complained that someone was elbowing her in the neck. The cigarette dropped from her mouth and landed between her thighs. She started cursing and trying to brush the embers off the seat cushion and Elody and Ally were still fighting and I was trying to talk over them, reminding them all of the time we’d made snow angels in May. The tires skidded a little on the wet road, and the car was full of cigarette smoke, little wisps rising like phantoms in the air.*

*Then all of a sudden there was a flash of white in front of the car. Lindsay yelled something—words I couldn’t make out, something like sit or shit or sight—and suddenly the car was flipping off the road and into the black mouth of the woods. I heard a horrible, screeching sound—metal on metal, glass shattering, a car folding in two—and smelled fire. I had time*

*to wonder whether Lindsay had put her cigarette out.*

*Then Vicky Hallinan's face came rising out of the past. I heard laughter echoing and rolling all around me, swelling into a scream.*

*Then nothing.*

*The thing is, you don't get to know. It's not like you wake up with a bad feeling in your stomach. You don't see shadows where there shouldn't be any. You don't remember to tell your parents that you love them or—in my case—remember to say good-bye to them at all.*

*If you're like me, you wake up seven minutes and forty-seven seconds before your best friend is supposed to be picking you up. You're too busy worrying about how many roses you're going to get on Cupid Day to do anything more than throw on your clothes, brush your teeth, and pray to God you left your makeup in the bottom of your messenger bag so you can do it in the car.*

*If you're like me, your last day starts like this:*